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Public Engagements with Lapland's Dark Heritage: Community Archaeology in Finnish Lapland

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Notes on Contributors

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in Finnish Lapland, including history hobbyists' activities, cemetery tourism, and oral histories of Sámi elders.

Oula Seitsonen, M.A., is a doctoral student at the University of Helsinki. He is a geographer and archaeologist, working in the project Lapland's Dark Heritage. His research interests cover pastoralist societies in Mongolia and East Africa, GIS and remote sensing applications in archaeology, the past of Lapland's wilderness areas, and the archaeology of Karelian Isthmus, Russia.

Abstract

Research project *Lapland's Dark Heritage* organized a one-week public excavation in Inari, Finnish Lapland, at a Second World War (WWII) German military hospital site in August 2016. #InariDig took place with the help of international experts and pre-registered volunteers. In this field report, two of the archaeologists leading the excavations and an ethnographer who took part in documenting this community archaeology experiment introduce the excavation sites and activities reflecting on the engagements with volunteers and local community.

Keywords: community archaeology, public archaeology, dark heritage, Lapland, Finland, Second World War, ethnography

#InariDig: Community Archaeology in Finnish Lapland, August 2016

Lapland's Dark Heritage is a research project coordinated by the Universities of Helsinki and Oulu, and funded by the Academy of Finland. The project seeks to understand the diverse cultural values

and meanings of the material heritage associated with the German military presence in northern Finland (Lapland) during WWII from late 1940, when the first troops started arriving, until late April 1945 (e.g. Ahto 1980).ⁱ We can consider this heritage as difficult and ambivalent because of the complexity of the Finnish and German relationship during the war: initially brothers-in-arms against the Soviet Union, later enemies in the so-called *Lapland War*. As part of the research, we carried out #InariDig: public excavations of a WWII German military hospital site in the village of Inari, August 1–5, 2016. The #InariDig team is composed of international specialists in conflict and public archaeology, archaeology and ethnology students as well as nine pre-registered volunteers, most of whom participated for the whole week. Since we were studying in Sápmi, the Sámi homeland stretching across northernmost Europe (Fig. 1), the National Museum of the Finnish Sámi, Siida, collaborated in the activities.

[Insert Figure 1 around here.]

The team selected the site of the German military hospital in Inari village for excavation for various reasons. Firstly, archaeological projects have only seldom explored WWII hospital sites in Finland, or elsewhere in Europe. Previous archaeological studies have typically concentrated on more martial sites, such as fortifications, military facilities, and prisoner-of-war (PoW) camps (Schofield et al., 2002; Seitsonen and Herva, 2011; Banks, 2011; Carr 2014; Passmore et al., 2013). We knew from interviews with local people that in addition to the German soldiers, German doctors and nurses also treated Inari villagers at the site, and the site forms a pertinent part of the local heritage. Project researchers visited the site in summer 2015 with local history expert Matti Lehtola, whose father had been treated there by a German military dentist during the war. Matti provides guided village tours concerning the history of Inari prior to the widespread destruction of the Lapland War. When we asked if he could improvise a WWII-themed tour, he agreed right away and led us on a tour of almost three hours around Inari village.

Furthermore, the site of the German military hospital was easily accessible. Both this structure and the museum are situated near a road and accommodation facilities in the village, as well as the museum, which offered a venue for public lectures; they are both relatively safe. This is an important consideration as there are still large amounts of potentially functioning unexploded ordnance (UXO) hidden in Lapland's wilderness. Applying scorched earth tactics, German troops not only destroyed all their military encampments but also placed hundreds of thousands of landmines and other explosives along the roads. The retreating army also dumped tons of ammunition in the forests, lakes and bog lands. This means that working on WWII sites in Lapland is potentially hazardous, so the German military hospital offered an opportunity to involve volunteers in a location where buried ordnance was unlikely. Nonetheless, while the risk of UXO was low, the site had been part of the scorched earth tactic, during which the Germans demolished and burned down the existing local infrastructure and dwellings. The village of Inari was largely destroyed in the war: the only surviving constructions in Inari parish were the pharmacist's fencepost and one hut (Lehtola, 2015, 10) (Fig. 2). When we began to uncover the site, we discovered severe fire damage to the hospital area, telling of the widespread destruction.

[Insert figure 2 around here].

Excavation Area 1

Oula Seitsonen, one of the team leaders, had done a landscape survey to locate the site in June 2016 and selected Excavation Area 1 to guarantee that the participating volunteers would find something. We placed it over a rich surface level scatter spotted during the preliminary mapping of the site. Visible from under the turf were numerous rusty tins, porcelain, glass, bed springs and miscellaneous metal objects (Fig. 1). We had no idea what had existed at this location during WWII, and before the excavations it could have represented either a destruction dump related to the

German retreat in 1944 or a building burned with all the items still inside. Most of the volunteers worked at this bigger excavation area under the supervision of Oula Seitsonen and the project's Principal Investigator Vesa-Pekka Herva.

Excavation Area 1 turned out to cover one corner of a heavily burned building, possibly a storage barrack. Finds included assorted medical supplies and related equipment, such as sherds of medicine bottles and thermometers, buckles, clasps, clips, and a lot of porcelain. It appeared that an extremely hot fire had obliterated the building and all the material inside it. This had melted, for instance, numerous glass urinal bottles, some with burned substances still inside them, into barely recognizable forms.ⁱⁱ Excavating the entire building could be part of the future site strategy, since there are no visible signs of foundations, pillars or fireplace(s) to indicate its size to the surface. This is also the case with all the other buildings that have stood at the site; they were all torched, and there are only very few traces of them visible above ground.

Excavation Area 2

Excavation Area 2 was deeper into the woods than Area 1. It lies a short distance from the narrow, overgrown former German road that runs through the forest, and a couple of hundred metres downslope from an air-raid trench. The 'International Brigade' of the project, directed by Iain Banks, identified this location during a walkover survey from a concentrated scatter of empty tubes on the ground. This site was a special project for the International Brigade,ⁱⁱⁱ along with several volunteers. Stripping back vegetation revealed a huge deposit of empty tubes of frostbite salve, glass bottles and other material, consistent with a hospital site. Intense heat had distorted and damaged all material, analogous to Excavation Area 1, although the extent of distortion to the glass was less extreme than at the first site. The burned area, roughly circular in shape, had a diameter of 5–6 metres. We interpreted it as the remains of a burnt, circular tent, such as the prefabricated

Finnish cardboard or plywood tent, which were a common feature of German camps during WWII. The production of plywood tents for the Wehrmacht was a lucrative business for Finnish entrepreneurs during the war; these tents were easy to set up and provided accommodation, supplies and services for the German troops (Westerlund, 2008). The structure had clearly been deliberately burned down, as the soil still smelled of petrol as we excavated, and we found one flare shell and the screwcap of a German hand-grenade (*Model 24 Stielhandgranate*), which were obviously used for igniting the fire. The tent had also been a store, and some of the tubes of frostbite salve were still in their packing cases, while others were used and empty. This suggested that the tent had contained a mixture of waste and unused materials being abandoned by the Germans before they retreated. There was also a curious deposit of white powder in one corner of the excavation area. One of our volunteers, with a medical background, identified this substance as plaster of Paris, emphasizing the medical nature of the site and also underlining the value of volunteers, who can contribute their own knowledge to the research (Fig. 3).

[Insert figure 3 around here.]

Doing archaeology with volunteers

Community or public archaeology is, at its best, a way for archaeologists and non-archaeologists to involve local communities in the archaeology of their locale, with the benefit of local efforts to preserve and manage archaeology. It can also pool volunteers' skills and knowledge in the investigation of archaeological sites, by working together to understand the historical events and processes that created and contextualized the site. One of the core aspects of community engagement is that it shifts the power relations of scholarly inquiry enabling non-archaeologists to have at least partial *control* over the different phases of the research process from planning stage to

archiving, storing and dissemination of the results (e.g. Simpson 2008; Moser et al. 2002). When it works, public archaeology means that archaeologist and non-archaeologist work in an environment of mutual respect, learning from one another, and knowing that their skills and knowledge are valued and taken seriously. It does not work so well if archaeologists treat volunteers as unpaid labourers to be ignored, or if the non-archaeologists refuse to accept the requirements of archaeological processes like excavation. We had no need for extra labour force, and thus volunteers were involved to include the wider community into the archaeological excavation process.

One drawback is that the nature of community archaeology tends to be that it is always pot luck on who will volunteer and what skills they will bring with them. We selected our volunteers solely based on the order in which they signed up through our website, and due to this, we had to leave out several interested people who were on the waiting list, since we could accommodate only about 10 volunteers per day. In the best cases, volunteer selection can work out very well, as it did in Inari, where it emerged that two of the volunteers had a medical background and could identify some of the excavated material because of their professional knowledge. They had specifically signed in owing to their own professional interest in medical history. We cannot rely upon such circumstances. Nonetheless, working with non-archaeologists frequently provides a refreshing new perspective on excavation.

To take the UK as an example (because of years of experience of involvement in British projects using volunteers by several members of the excavation team), many excavations described as community or public archaeology have been excellent examples of good practice of involving the community (Faulkner 2000; Belford 2011; Pollard 2016)^{iv}, although one failing has been a lack of publication. In Britain those who participate in community archaeology projects tend to be middle-class, generally educated to degree level, and with a general interest in history and archaeology. Many are retired, indulging an interest that they had put to one side during their working lives,

while others are young, attracted through TV archaeology, and who may be contemplating doing Archaeology at university; these might also be the people with most time to participate. With the older volunteers, many have years of experience, and will travel long distances to participate in archaeological projects (see Thomas 2010; Woolverton 2016).^v

The same general observations seem to apply to the #InariDig attendees . The experience of the volunteers is a bonus for the academic members who get eager, motivated and skillful participants on the project. Their backgrounds for the #InariDig were similar to in the UK (Thomas 2010): most were middle-class (in the Finnish sense, including volunteers with professions such as nurse and physiotherapist)^{vi}, had some higher education and even experience in conducting scientific research. We originally chose 12 volunteers by order of signing up. Two people cancelled their participation at the last minute and one did not react to emails or phone inquiries. Of our nine volunteers, one was eventually picked up from the waiting list. Geographically, the pattern was balanced: three of the volunteers, and one volunteer's family which she frequently visits, live in Lapland, while five came from southern Finland. However, only two participants originated from Inari; there were also other Inari residents on the waiting list to volunteer, but we could not accommodate them this time. Only two volunteers were male. A majority were interested and educated young adults or middle-aged, which also differs from the average age of British experiences. In Britain, most participants in community archaeological projects are retired and in the 50+ age bracket (e.g. Woolverton 2016).

However, the profile of the volunteers raises the question of whether we can describe these kinds of public archaeological projects as public or community archaeology, given the scarcity of Inari inhabitants among our volunteers. If the volunteers represent a relatively limited number of individuals who derive from one or two sections of society and/or come from outside of the studied locality, and who may have travelled a long way to participate, can we talk of community archaeology? Clearly, there are some aspects of community or public archaeology that do not work

the way that we would like. Even with intensive publicity to target across-the-board community participation, most volunteers appear to be middle-class in both Finland and the UK. At the same time, more of the surrounding community^{vii} will usually turn out to visit the site; in large numbers on open days, and individually throughout the project, as was also the case in Inari. There appears to be no lack of interest in the projects, but unfortunately most of the locals in Inari were slow to sign up, and some appear to feel that their relationship to archaeology is more as an audience rather than as participants. This was especially expressed by the older people who visited.

It is also notable that all of our volunteers in Inari shared an interest in outdoor life, which appears to be specific to Lapland. For instance, two friends shared an especially strong interest in WWII history, nature and Lapland, and had done several excursions to dark heritage sites in Finland and Northern Norway. They also expressed a wish to discover other war sites in the area and so the research team organized an excursion to a nearby PoW camp, which all volunteers wanted to join. They also had a third volunteer joining into their friendship as the result of our excavation, and they have continued to explore the Lapland landscape together.

Interestingly, German WWII material heritage played an active role in motivating many volunteers. One volunteer was from Germany originally, while two more reported to have German connections in their families, and others also reported special interests in Lapland's German war history. This corroborates our wider research concerning the motivation for the engagement of history enthusiasts and collectors with the WWII material heritage in Finnish Lapland: most of the history hobbyists seem to have personal and local connections to this particular heritage (e.g. Koskinen-Koivisto and Thomas 2016; Herva et al. 2016; Seitsonen 2017). Special interests included professional and scientific expertise. For instance, the previously mentioned volunteers with medical backgrounds reported in the registration form that they wanted to participate since they could provide their 'inside knowledge' on identifying any sanitary material we found. Only one volunteer told us she had no specific interest in history but wanted to experience something

unique during her summer holiday as a getaway from her demanding job. The volunteers and researchers also forged new friendships during the dig: we managed to create an active community of researchers and volunteers as the result of our excavations (Purra 2016). We have kept in contact since the excavations, which resulted in over half of the 2016 volunteers signing up for the research in 2017, alongside our new volunteers.

Engaging with the local community

#InariDig received much media attention at a national level both before and during the excavations^{viii}, and many locals took part in the activities we organized alongside the excavations. These included two guided excavation tours, several public lectures, a story night in collaboration with the Inari library (at the Ivalo municipal centre 40 km south of Inari), and a village tour at the war historical sites with Matti Lehtola. The various activities, lectures, site visits, and the tour lured altogether over 30 people to learn about the WWII history of the area, which is a relatively high number in a small village of approximately 500 residents; according to the staff of the Sámi museum Siida, this represents more participants than usually for this kind of activity (Fig. 4). Alongside local villagers, also some summer residents of the area took part, one of whom had a particular interest in WWII history. Several of the local history hobbyists and activists that we have interviewed during our research (e.g. Herva et al. 2016; Thomas et al. 2016) also visited us on site.

[Insert figure 4 around here.]

One of us (Banks) remembers an interesting experience in England while working on the BBC television series ‘Two Men in a Trench’, which might have relevance also for planning our

future work with the community volunteers in Lapland. The series investigated various British battles using a combination of archaeology and history, where archaeologists, metal detectorists, historians, and public volunteers all worked together. On one shoot in particular, a couple of trenches were excavated in a churchyard within a small English village. During the first week, the crew had local visitors to the site asking if they had either found any gold yet or if they would like to go and dig their garden for them, in a typical manner of visitors to archaeological excavations.^{ix} All the visitors focused on the archaeology in the trenches, either expressing interest in what they were finding or telling the archaeologists, again as usual, that they were clearly digging in the wrong place and should instead dig where ‘everyone’ knew the important things would be found. For this first week, archaeology was a novelty that held everyone’s attention. However, by the second week, there was a distinct change in the visitors: by now, they were talking and engaging with *each other*. Visitors were still paying attention to the trenches, but the real focus of conversation was with each other and about their village. Towards the end of the shoot, one villager commented that the project had brought the village together in an unprecedented way. The village had become a dormitory for a large city, with the inhabitants all commuting to work every day, nearly all were incomers who did not know one another, and there was no village shop or pub to act as a focal point for the community. Thus, the archaeological project provided unexpectedly that focal point, albeit briefly, but in the course of two weeks, people began to engage with fellow residents they had never talked to before. Quite unpredictably, the crew had caused a sense of community to begin to develop within that village. We have no idea how long it survived, but that project was one situation where a dig truly turned into community archaeology. It is too early to say whether #InariDig will have similar effects, but we hope that in due course our continuing work in Inari will encourage the local community to engage more with the WWII and other heritage in the forests around them, and hopefully also with each other.

There have already been some wonderful and unplanned public outreach related to #InariDig, like in the aforementioned English case. These include, most remarkably, a commemorative Greek-Orthodox memorial service at a nearby PoW camp site, which we excavated in 2015 in Inari, to remember the anonymous Soviet PoWs who were confined there during the war. Two volunteers, overwhelmed by the melancholic site, asked if a local priest would like to hold a service at the site. As a result, one of us (Seitsonen) and Vesa-Pekka Herva together with the local priest of the Skolt Sámi, father Rauno Pietarinen, raised an Orthodox cross at the camp in September. The priest held a memorial service at this PoW camp in early October, which attracted 20 attendees to this remote place. Many of them were locals who had some personal ties to the locality, such as people who grew up in the vicinity and had played in the camp as children. They described us that the ceremony brought them together for the first time after a long while at this childhood playground.

Outcomes of #InariDig

#InariDig created a core volunteer community that has continued to interact after the public excavations. The volunteers were already discussing during the excavations possible ways to keep in contact, and the idea of a closed Facebook group for the volunteers and scholars emerged. We set up this group right after the excavations ended, and altogether 17 people have joined. Finnish volunteers also wanted to invite the international team members in the group and therefore often post in English as well as Finnish. Three core members of this Facebook group have also started planning further activities, like sharing documentaries, books and other information, and advertising, for example, photogrammetry courses to the group. Some volunteers also provided researchers with material that they have acquired like rare old orienteering maps of Inari village, which have proven to be good material for archaeological analyses.

#InariDig also sparked the local library to document the area's wartime history, within their project 'Stories of Inari' (*Tarinoiden Inari*), documenting local folklore through interviews with elders and an open virtual sound database (<http://www.tarinoideninari.fi/>). Inari Library recorded Matti Lehtola's war village tour and, alongside the National Museum of the Finnish Sámi Siida and other local agents, plans to situate QR-coded signs at the locations identified by Matti as significant war heritage sites. This promotes the hitherto marginalized northern Sámi and Finnish war experiences, which differ considerably from the recognized 'national story' of the war that concentrates largely on the southern Finnish actions (see Kivimäki 2012; Lehtola 2015). Shortly after the excavations, Inari municipal officials and local tourism entrepreneurs also organized a public discussion about developing wartime-related tourism in the area, and sought our participation as potential experts. This was a delightful turn of events, since from the start of our WWII studies we have tried to promote the positive use-potential of Lapland's 'dark heritage' and to find ways to benefit the local community, for instance, through encouraging discussions on potential cultural tourism.

We were able to continue working with the public in 2017, uncovering more of Lapland's WWII material heritage. The University of Helsinki Future Fund sponsored #InariDig2, a further two-week field research season at German sites in northern Inari. As soon as we announced funding, we received several applications to attend the excavations from our 2016 volunteers, along with new volunteers in August 2017. Interest in the project has remained high, the 2017 excavations generating several newspaper reports and even TV news coverage. Lapland's Dark Heritage will continue to be researched as new research strands have developed. We hope that the research will help to enhance positive engagements for the inhabitants of Inari with their own wartime heritage which is already part of their everyday world.

More information about the #InariDig and #InariDig2 at the project's blog

(<http://blogs.helsinki.fi/lapland-dark-heritage/>), public Facebook page

(<https://www.facebook.com/Laplands-Dark-Heritage-1739806009628668/>), Twitter account

(<https://twitter.com/DarkLapland>; @darklapland) and Instagram account

(https://www.instagram.com/dig_inari/).

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Captions:

Figure 1. Location of Inari in Lapland, and the volunteers working at Excavation Area 1 (copyright Oula Seitsonen 2016).

Figure 2. The pharmacist’s fencepost, the only surviving pre-WWII structure in Inari village. (copyright Oula Seitsonen 2015).

Figure 3. Volunteers with medical background digging at Excavation Area 2 (copyright Iain Banks 2016).

Figure 4. Local historian Matti Lehtola directing a historical war tour in Inari (copyright Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto 2016).

ⁱ After the Winter War (1939–40) between Finland and the Soviet Union, Finland was afraid of a new attack. In summer 1941, Finland allied with Germany and over 200000 German soldiers were on the Northern frontiers of Finnish Lapland, advancing east into the Soviet territory. The alliance ended in 1944 when Finland signed a separate ceasefire treaty with the Soviet Union as the Eastern Front collapsed. One of the demands from the Soviets was to end the collaboration with the Germans and drive them out of the country, leading to mass civilian evacuation by the Finns and Germans to southern Finland and neutral Sweden. The German reaction became the Lapland War (1944–45), resulting in large-scale destruction across Northern Finland, as they adopted ‘scorched earth tactics’ in both Finnish and Norwegian Lapland (e.g. Ahto 1980).

ⁱⁱ It is worth noting that borosilicate glass, which has been the normal form of glassware in medical and laboratory use since the end of the nineteenth century, has a softening point of 820° Celsius and a melting point at a much higher temperature (Weissler 1979, 315).

ⁱⁱⁱ The International Brigade was what we called the international researchers who came to work on the project: Dr Gabe Moshenska of University College, London; Prof Jaisson Teixeira Lino of Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul; and Dr Iain Banks of the Centre for Battlefield Archaeology at the University of Glasgow.

^{iv} See also Simpson and Williams 2008, for a less positive view of community archaeology.

^v Before the advent of commercial archaeology from the late 1980s in Scotland, the most experienced excavators were generally keen amateurs who participated in a range of excavations carried out by archaeological societies and university departments.

^{vi} Here middle-class is defined based on income, economic security and education level, all generally very high in Finland. The middle-class is therefore very broad and socially mobile.

^{vii} To define 'community' geographically obscures the layers of identity within a community; layers of identity will have a definite impact on levels of participation. The involvement of some will mean exclusion or refusal to participate of others. However, as outsiders, archaeologists have little option other than dealing with community as a geographical entity.

^{viii} Many volunteers told us they had seen public excavations advertised in the national state broadcasting company Yle's webpages (article on June 8, 2016

http://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/sapmi/inarissa_tutkitaan_lapin_sodassa_tuhotun_saksalaisen_sotilassairaalan_raunioita_vapa_ahtoisten_voimin/8941161). Also the local public Sámi channel Yle Sápmi and the local newspapers took an interest, as had happened with our earlier research of Lapland's WWII history (articles on August, 10, 2016). Local weekly newspaper *Inarilainen* managed to report about our excavations only after the event, although their reporter spent considerable time at the site with us and the volunteers (article not accessible online).

^{ix} These are amongst the most widely heard comments from visitors to archaeological sites, and to the authors' certain knowledge, have been used since the 1980s at least. They are a verbal meme, and visitors almost seem to feel that they are required to make these comments.